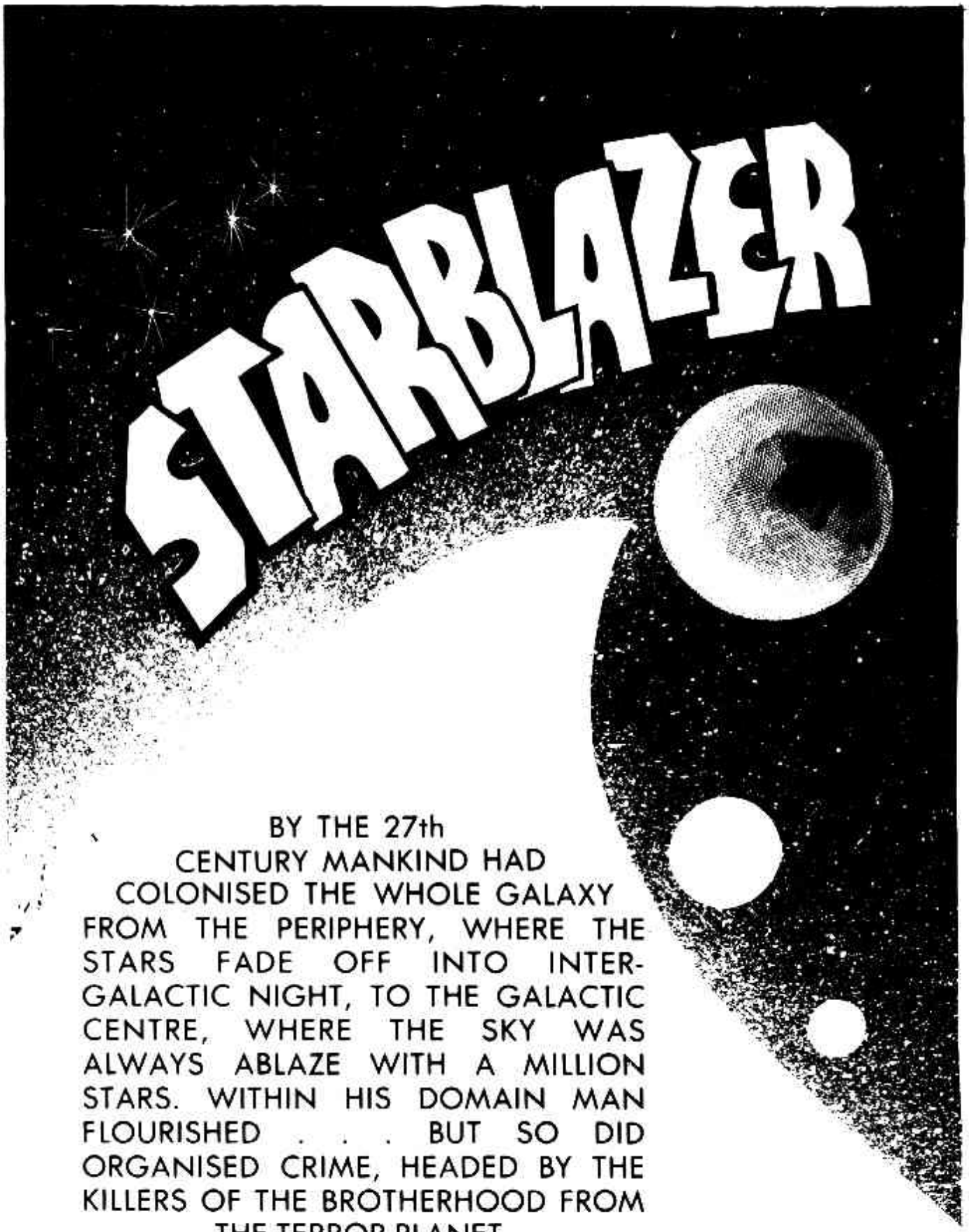
STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 88

18p

ALIEN CITIES IN THE TEN-MILE HIGH TREES HID
THE MOST RUTHLESS KILLERS IN THE GALAXY

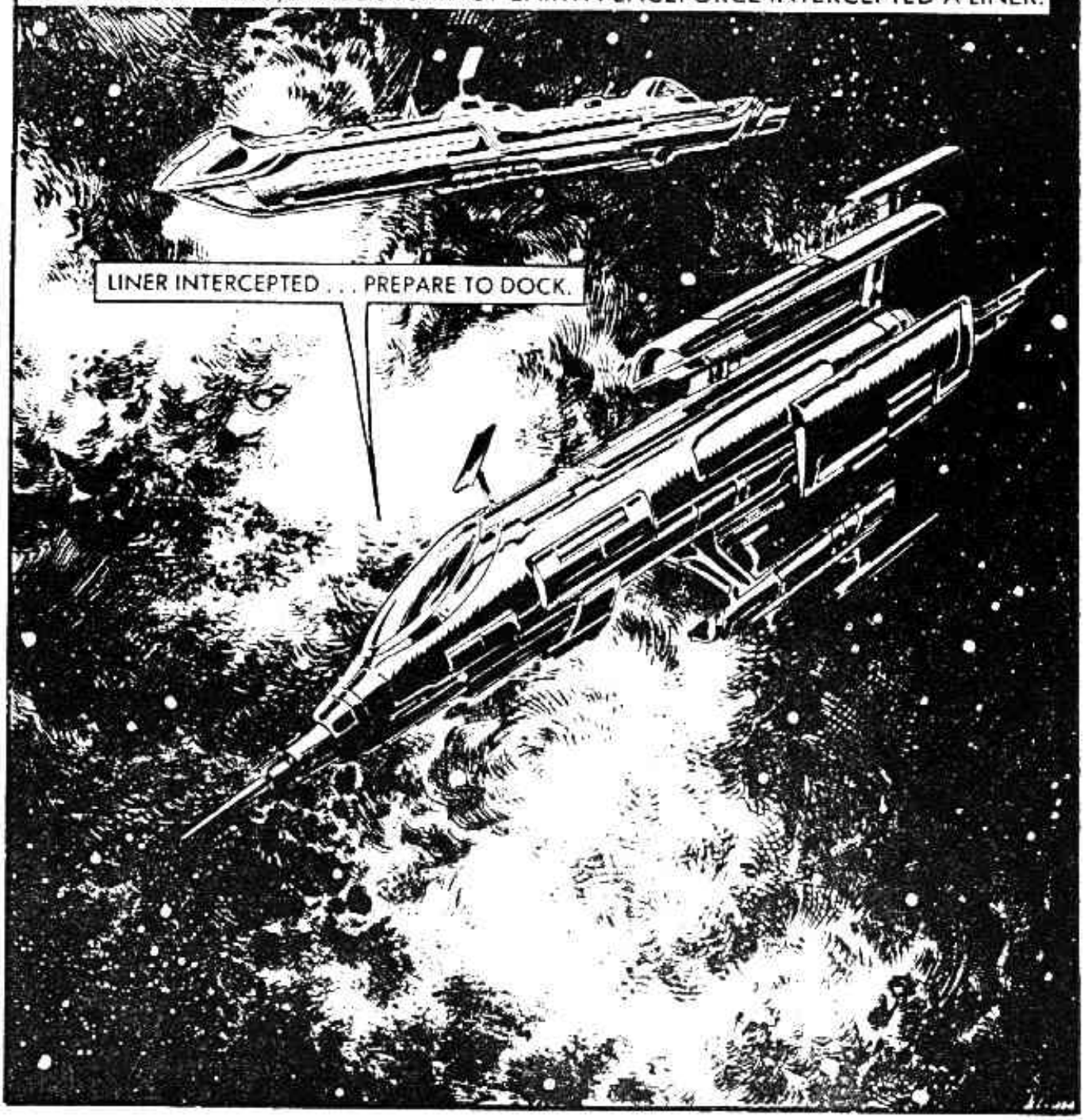
TERROR PLANET



BY THE 27th CENTURY MANKIND HAD COLONISED THE WHOLE GALAXY FROM THE PERIPHERY, WHERE THE STARS FADE OFF INTO INTER-GALACTIC NIGHT, TO THE GALACTIC CENTRE, WHERE THE SKY WAS ALWAYS ABLAZE WITH A MILLION STARS. WITHIN HIS DOMAIN MAN FLOURISHED . . . BUT SO DID ORGANISED CRIME, HEADED BY THE KILLERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD FROM THE TERROR PLANET.

TERROR PLANET

ON SPACELANE A85, A SCOUTSHIP OF EARTH PEACEFORCE INTERCEPTED A LINER.

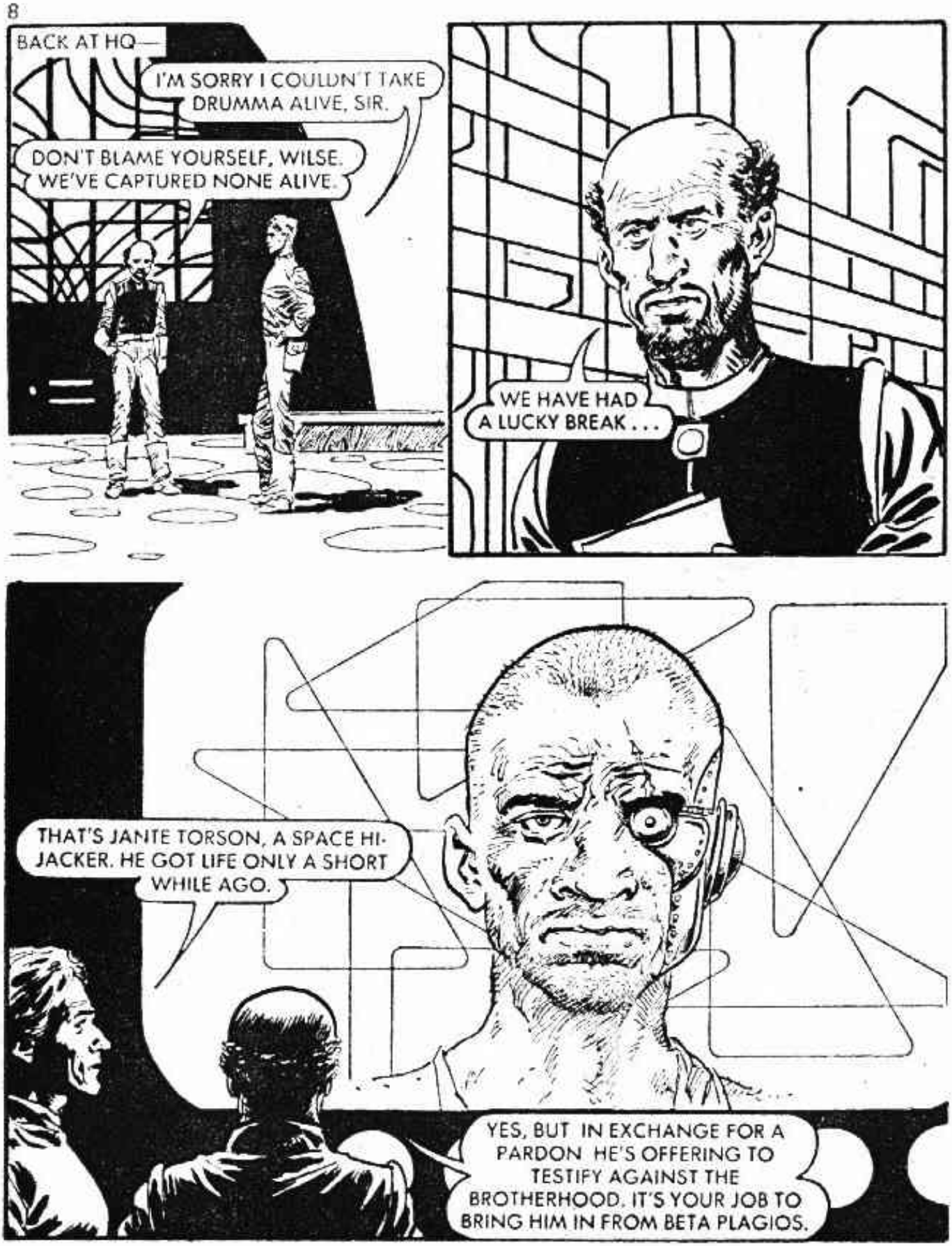


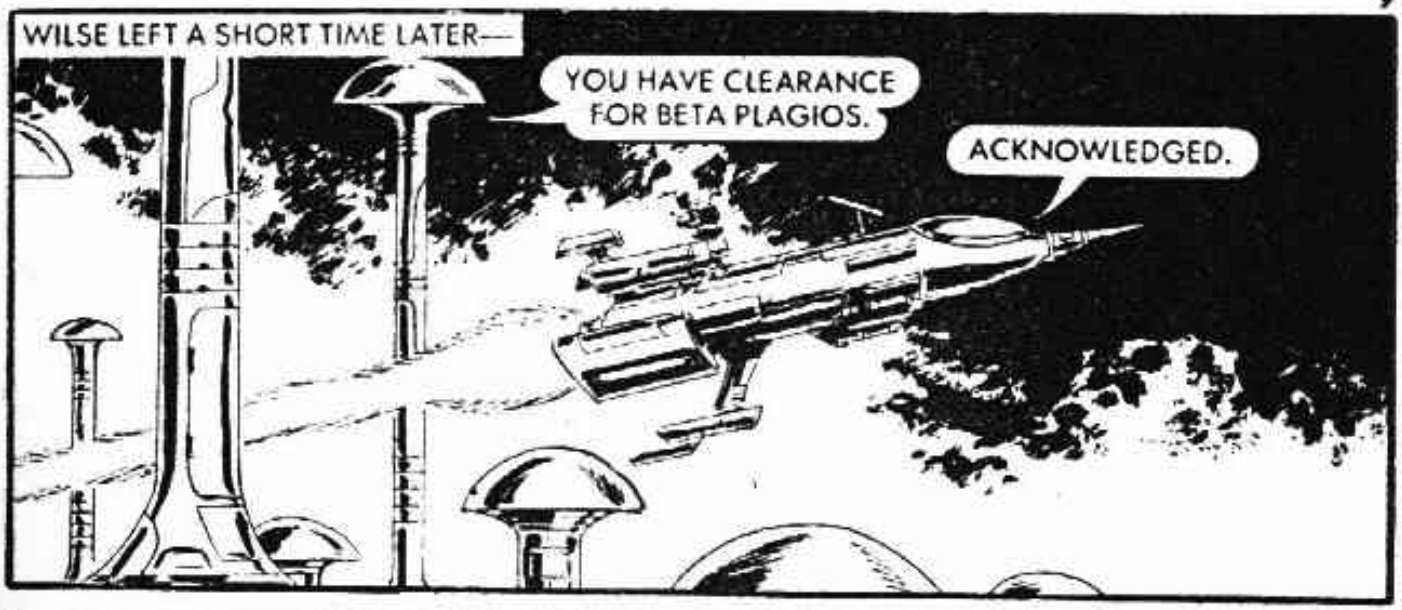
ON BOARD THE SCOUTSHIP, CAPTAIN WILSE PREPARED TO TRANSFER —
WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN THIS TIME?
I'M COMING ABOARD— EXTEND DOCKING TUBE!

WILSE TRANSFERRED AND APPEARED THROUGH THE LINER'S AIRLOCK —
I'VE A WARRANT TO ARREST GALACTIC OFFICIAL SELDON DRUMMA, ONE OF YOUR PASSENGERS.
HE'S IN FORWARD OBSERVATION.

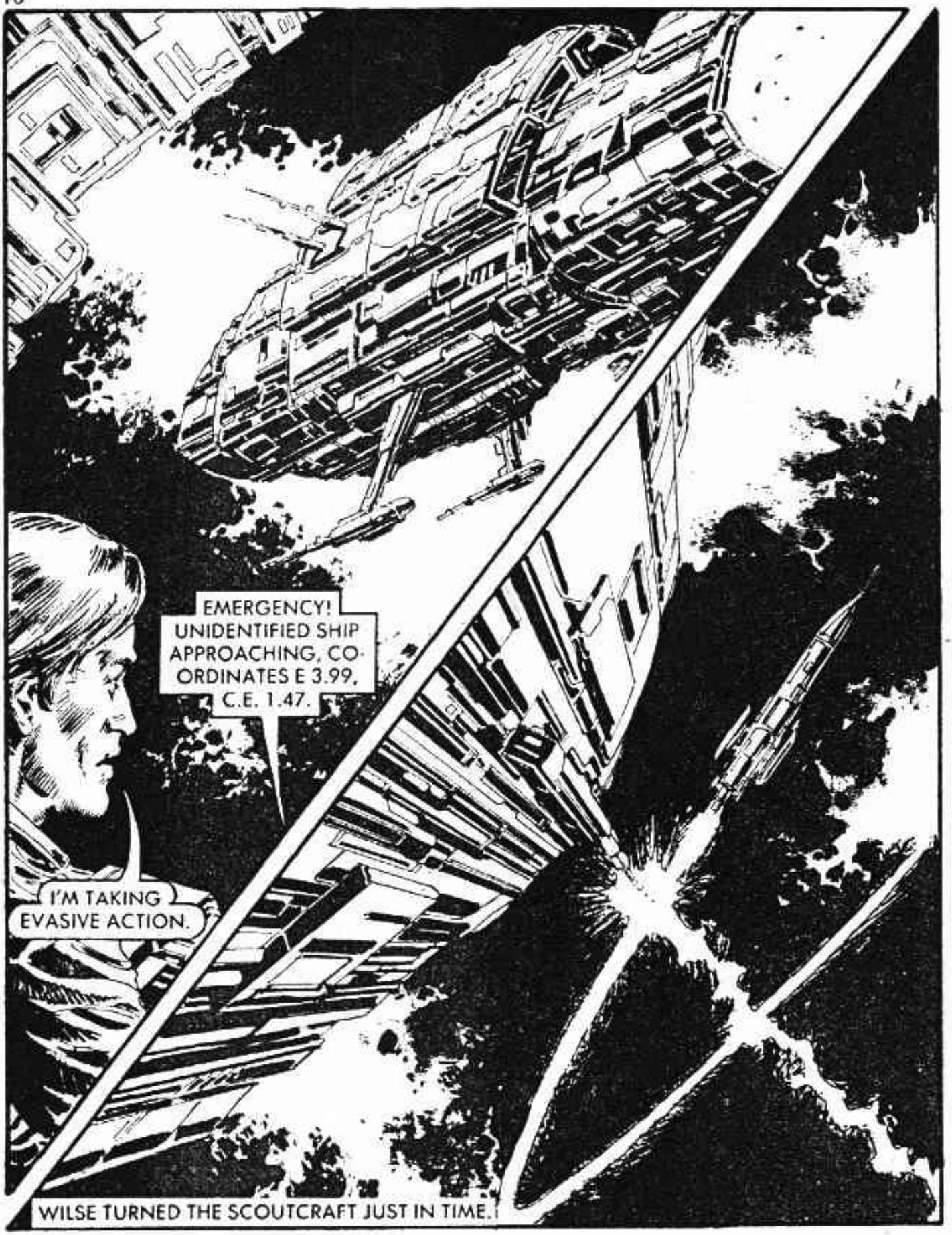
IN THE LINER'S OBSERVATION SECTION
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST, DRUMMA.
NO!
DRUMMA RAN TO THE AIRLOCK.
STOP! YOU CAN'T ESCAPE THAT WAY!

TOO LATE!
GREAT-SPACE! HE'S KILLED HIMSELF RATHER THAN BE CAPTURED!
HE'S NOT THE FIRST. HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT TO THE COMMISSIONER?


BACK AT HQ—
I'M SORRY I COULDN'T TAKE DRUMMA ALIVE, SIR.
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, WILSE. WE'VE CAPTURED NONE ALIVE.
WE HAVE HAD A LUCKY BREAK . . .
THAT'S JANTE TORSON, A SPACE HI-JACKER. HE GOT LIFE ONLY A SHORT WHILE AGO.
YES, BUT IN EXCHANGE FOR A PARDON HE'S OFFERING TO TESTIFY AGAINST THE BROTHERHOOD. IT'S YOUR JOB TO BRING HIM IN FROM BETA PLAGIOS.


WILSE LEFT A SHORT TIME LATER—
YOU HAVE CLEARANCE FOR BETA PLAGIOS.
ACKNOWLEDGED.

THE JOURNEY WAS SHORT—
BETA PLAGIOS IS NOW SEVENTEEN LIGHT MINUTES AWAY.


EMERGENCY! UNIDENTIFIED SHIP APPROACHING, CO-ORDINATES E 3.99, C.E. 1.47.
I'M TAKING EVASIVE ACTION.
WILSE TURNED THE SCOUTCRAFT JUST IN TIME.

PLOT A COURSE FOR ATMOSPHERE SKIPPING.
AFFIRMATIVE!
THE TURBULENCE OF THE PLANET'S UPPER ATMOSPHERE SHOULD CONFUSE THEIR AIM.

IT'S WORKING! SKIPPING OFF THE ATMOSPHERE WILL GIVE ME THE EXTRA SPEED I NEED . . .
WILSE RETURNED FIRE.

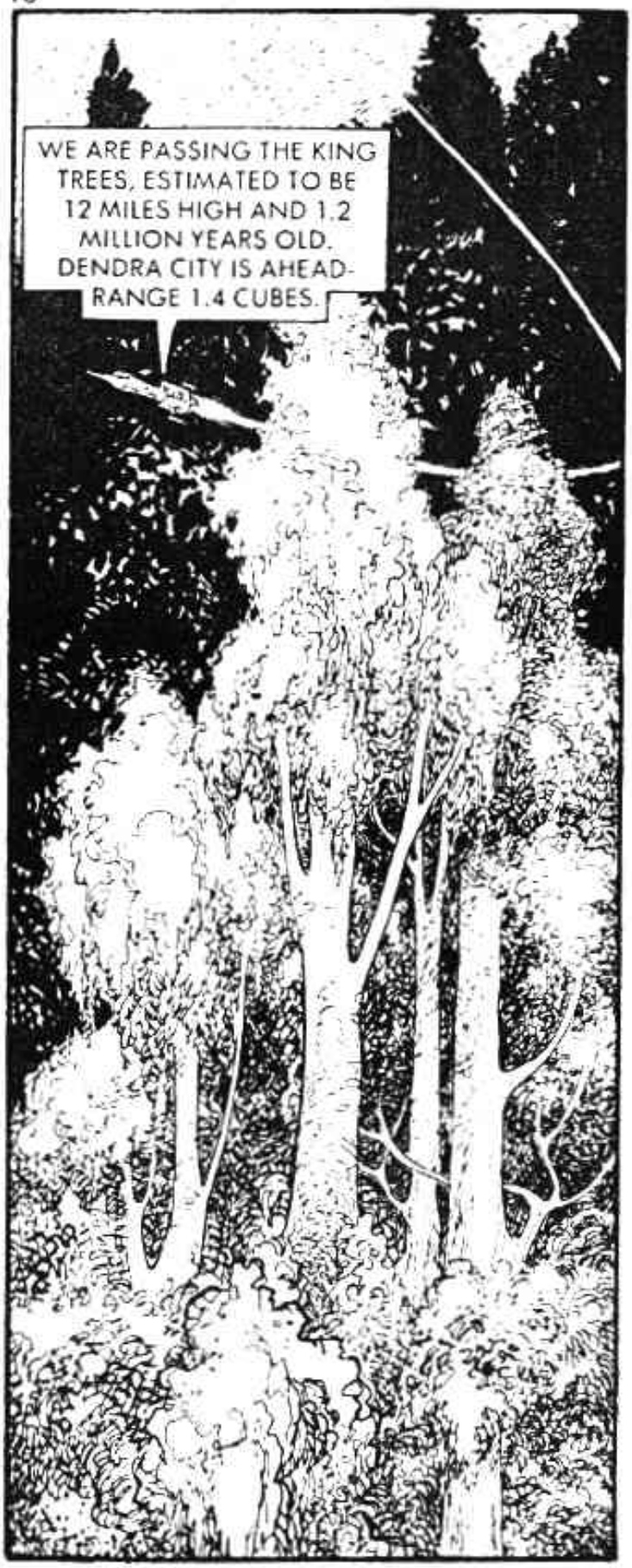
THE SHIP EXPLODED—
THAT SHIP WAS WAITING FOR ME, SO IT'S LOGICAL TO ASSUME IT WAS A BROTHERHOOD SHIP— SOMEWHERE THERE IS A TRAITOR IN HQ.
THE SCOUTSHIP RESUMED ITS COURSE.
TORSON'S ASTEROID IS ON SCREEN NOW.
INCREASE MAGNIFICATION.

TORSON'S REFUGE LAY IN RUINS—
WILSE JETTED DOWN TO THE ASTEROID—
WRECKED— WHOEVER DID THIS DIDN'T WANT TORSON AROUND.
A SAFETY CHAMBER! THE SEAL'S STILL GOOD. TORSON MAY BE OKAY.

TORSON!
TAKE IT EASY . . .
BROTHERHOOD COULDN'T GET TO ME . . . SO THEY INFECTED MY AIR SUPPLY WITH POISON GAS . . . DENDRA . . . THE PLANET DENDRA . . .
DEAD! MURDERED BY THE BROTHERHOOD! ONLY PEACEFORCE KNEW OF TORSON'S DEAL. A TRAITOR AGAIN . . . BUT WHY DENDRA?

WILSE SET OUT FOR DENDRA, AFTER INFORMING BASE.
WE ARE NOW IN ORBIT AROUND DENDRA.
THIS ECOLOGY CORPS UNIFORM SHOULD PROVIDE GOOD COVER FOR SNOOPING ON DENDRA.
AFFIRMATIVE! A SPECIAL ECOLOGICAL SURVEY IS DUE ON DENDRA.

DENDRA'S TEN MILE HIGH TREES WERE ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN THE CARBON DIOXIDE-OXYGEN BALANCE IN THE ATMOSPHERE. TOO FEW TREES MEANT TOO MUCH CARBON DIOXIDE AND TOO MANY TREES MEANT AN EXCESS OF OXYGEN BOTH OF WHICH COULD LEAD TO POISONING OF TERRANS. A CLOSE WATCH WAS KEPT FOR FIRES AND DISEASE.


WE ARE PASSING THE KING TREES, ESTIMATED TO BE 12 MILES HIGH AND 1.2 MILLION YEARS OLD. DENDRA CITY IS AHEAD- RANGE 1.4 CUBES.

WE ARE NOW HELD IN THE SPACEPORT FORCE FIELD.
SHUT OFF ALL SYSTEMS.

DENDRA'S CITIES WERE BUILT HIGH UP IN THE TREES.

A FORCE FIELD RAMP WAS ACTIVATED TO ENABLE WILSE TO DISEMBARK.
SO THIS IS DENDRA CITY!

THAT IS THE MAN I MUST KILL!

A LASER BLAST MISSED WILSE BY A MATTER OF FEET . . .
WHAT THE . . . ?

. . . BUT RUPTURED THE FORCE RAMP.
MY SAFETY LINE!

WILSE DESPERATELY FIRED HIS SAFETY LINE AT THE GIANT TREE TRUNK.
THE POINTED HEAD BURIED ITSELF IN THE TREE.
BLACK HOLES OF DENEB! THAT WAS VERY CLOSE.

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE WILSE WAS FOUND.
OVER HERE!

I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU.
SORRY ABOUT THE CORRIDOR FAILURE. CAN'T THINK WHAT HAPPENED.

THEY COULDN'T HAVE SEEN THE ASSASSIN — I'LL LOOK FOR HIM.
I'LL RUN A CHECK ON YOUR SYSTEM WITH THIS MEDKIT. JUST IN CASE OF SHOCK YOU KNOW.
I DON'T NEED IT. JUST GET ME TO THE CITY.
AS YOU WISH.
THERE HE IS.
AFTER A SHORT TIME SEARCHING—

THE CHASE BEGAN . . .
STOP HIM!
LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING!
SORRY!

HE THINKS HE'S LOST ME. HE'S WRONG.
WILSE TRAPPED THE ASSASSIN.
I'LL GET YOU THIS TIME, GALACTIC AGENT!
I DOUBT IT!

GIVE YOURSELF UP NOW.
NEVER!

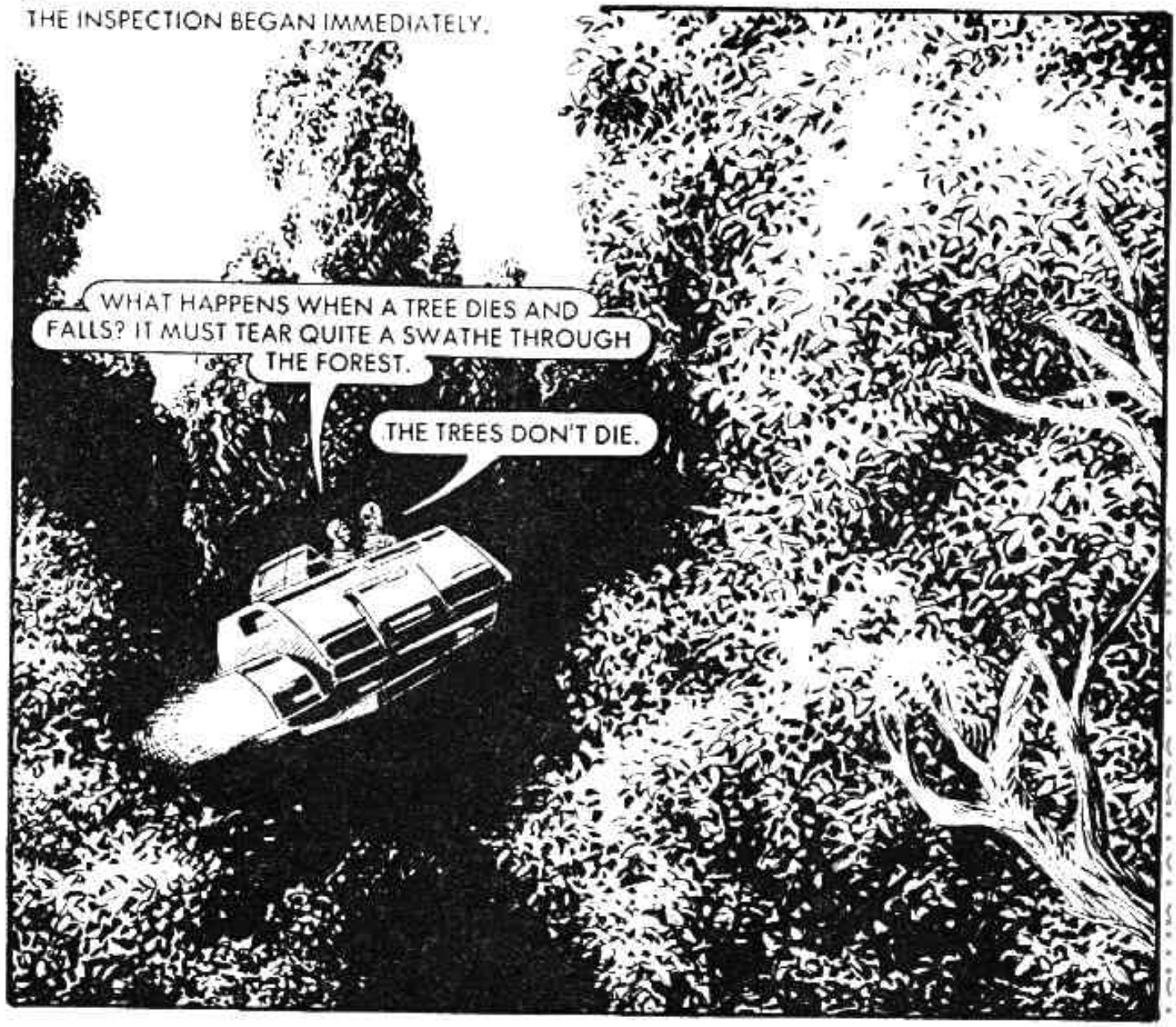
THE ASSASSIN FLUNG HIMSELF INTO SPACE.
WHA . . .
HE CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN CAPTURE. SO THE BROTHERHOOD HAVE ME SPOTTED — AND LINED UP FOR ELIMINATION.
THERE WERE NO BRANCHES TO BREAK THE ASSASSIN'S FALL.

WILSE WENT TO HIS HOTEL . . .

. . . TO FIND HIMSELF AWAITED.
WELCOME. I'M BARTH RANO, THE RESIDENT ECOLOGIST. GLAD TO MEET YOU.
I EXPECTED TO SEE YOU AT THE SPACEPORT.

I WAS DOING MY ANNUAL SURVEY OF THE KING TREES WHEN I GOT YOUR MESSAGE.
THE KING TREES ARE VITAL. WE DO NOT ALLOW CITIES THERE. AND TOURISTS CAN ONLY FLY OVER THEM.
THE KING TREES MIGHT MAKE A GOOD STARTING POINT FOR MY INSPECTION TOUR.
AN EXCELLENT IDEA. I'LL ARRANGE THE SCHEDULE APPROPRIATELY.

THE INSPECTION BEGAN IMMEDIATELY.



BEFORE WILSE COULD GET AN ANSWER—
WE'RE FALLING!
AN ENGINE FAILURE!
THE AIRCAR PLUNGED TOWARDS THE FOREST FLOOR.

THE AIRCAR SLOWED—
THE BUILT-IN ANTI-GRAVITY SYSTEM HAS TAKEN OVER.
THE AIRCAR DESCENDED TO THE FOREST FLOOR.

THE FOREST FLOOR WAS BATHED IN GLOOM. THE UPPER FOLIAGE FILTERED OFF THE LIGHT.
I'LL TAKE A LOOK AROUND.
DO THAT! I'LL CONTACT DENDRA CITY FOR HELP.

WHAT A SIZE, AND IT ISN'T EVEN HALF GROWN YET.
RAMO, HOW OLD IS THIS TREE?
RAMO! WHERE ARE YOU?

TWO OTHER MEN APPEARED –
RAMO'S GONE — WE'VE COME TO FETCH YOU.
TWO TO ONE, EH?

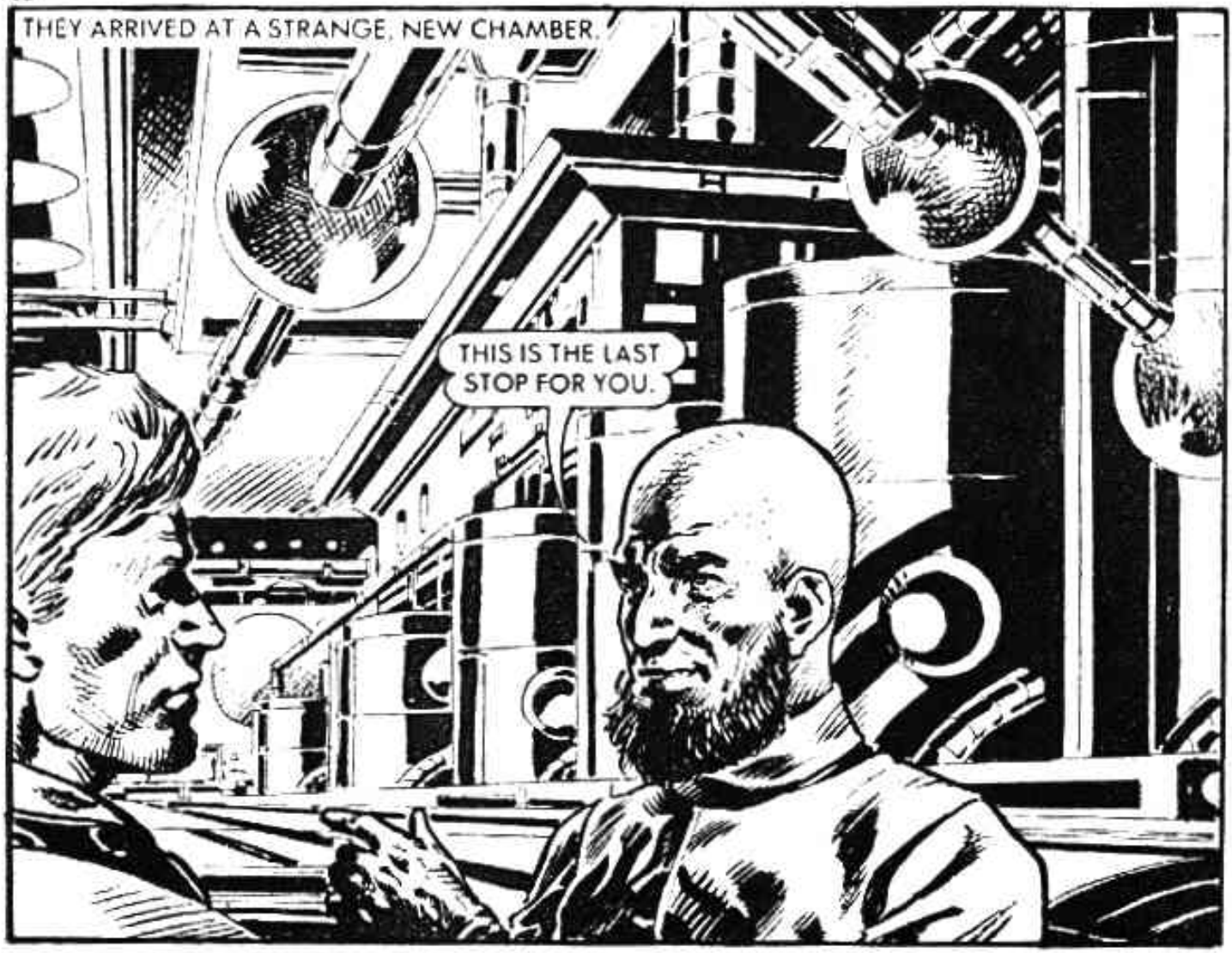
A MAGNAPOWER BEAM INCREASED PHYSICAL STRENGTH THROUGH A REDUCTION IN GRAVITY.

WE'VE SOME TALKING TO DO.

UNSEEN BY WILSE, THE THIRD MAN FIRED . . .

THESE TANGLE FIBRES ARE TOO STRONG TO BREAK!
THE ANTIGRAV PACK WILL MAKE YOU EASIER TO TRANSPORT. YOUR WALKING DAYS ARE OVER, WILSE.
I APPEAR TO HAVE DISCOVERED MY ADVERSARIES.

WILSE WAS TRANSPORTED DEEP INTO THE KING TREE FOREST — THEY TRAVELLED DOWN DARK CORRIDOR AFTER DARK CORRIDOR . . .
. . . AND BETWEEN THEM WERE MASSIVE CHAMBERS HOLLOWED OUT OF THE TREES.
THIS IS THE FIFTH CHAMBER WE'VE PASSED THROUGH! THE WHOLE KING TREE RIDGE MUST BE HOLLOWED OUT!


THEY ARRIVED AT A STRANGE, NEW CHAMBER.
THIS IS THE LAST STOP FOR YOU.

THE BROTHERHOOD LEADER ARRIVED —
WE BROUGHT HIM HERE, SIR, AS YOU ORDERED.

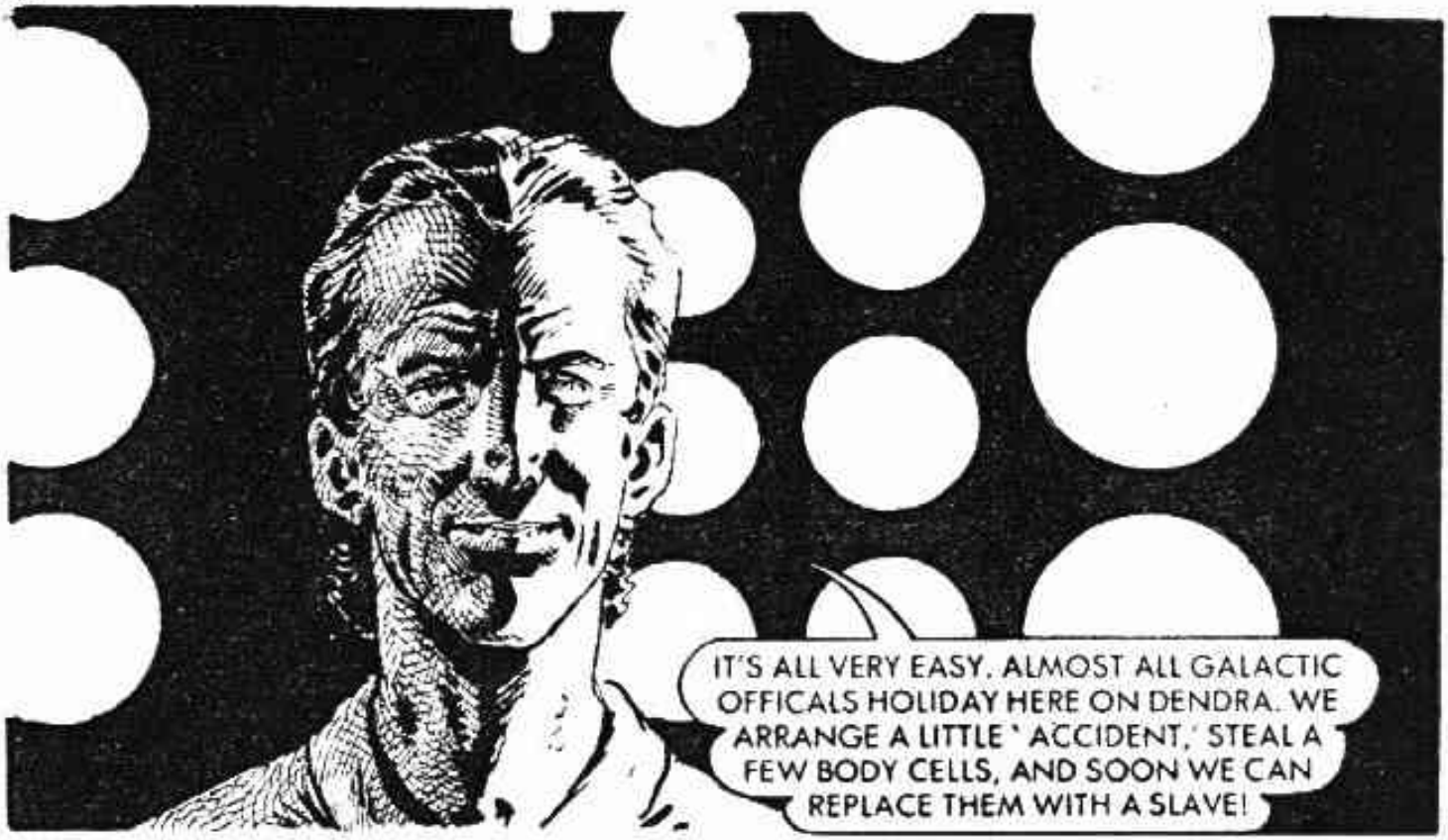
YOU ARE SURPRISED? YOUR MISSION WAS TO COME TO DENDRA TO DISCOVER THE IDENTITY OF THE LEADER OF THE BROTHERHOOD — YOU'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.
TOO SUCCESSFUL, PERHAPS. YOU ARE NOW IN THE HEART OF OUR HQ. I DOUBT IF YOU'LL BE ABLE TO REPORT TO YOUR COMMISSIONER.
LOOK AROUND YOU, WILSE. AT THE TANKS. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE?
SOME KIND OF LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM.

MORE THAN THAT! THEY ARE LIFE-CREATING TANKS!
GREAT SPACE! BIO-CLONE!

BIO-CLONING WAS THE ILLEGAL SCIENCE OF USING A SINGLE CELL OF STOLEN FLESH . . .

. . . AND THEN GROWING IT IN A LIFE SUPPORT TANK TO PRODUCE . . .

. . . A FULL GROWN CLONE!
WE USE THE CLONE TO REPLACE ITS ORIGINAL—AFTER WE'VE PROGRAMMED IT TO OBEY US IMPLICITLY. EVEN TO COMMIT SUICIDE IF CAUGHT . . .
SO DRUMMA AND THE ASSASSIN WERE PROGRAMMED CLONES.


IT'S ALL VERY EASY. ALMOST ALL GALACTIC OFFICALS HOLIDAY HERE ON DENDRA. WE ARRANGE A LITTLE 'ACCIDENT,' STEAL A FEW BODY CELLS, AND SOON WE CAN REPLACE THEM WITH A SLAVE!

COME THIS WAY! I HAVE SOMETHING EVEN MORE INTERESTING TO SHOW YOU.
EVEN MORE EVIL, YOU MEAN!

EVIL? A MATTER OF VIEWPOINT . . . WHEN YOU SURVIVED YOUR FALL SOMETHING ELSE HAD TO BE DONE WITH YOU. WE TOOK A SAMPLE OF YOUR BLOOD AND SKIN—REMEMBER THE MEDKIT? — AND . . .

BLACK HOLES OF SPACE — ME!

I WILL DESTROY YOU, RAMO, AND THE BROTHERHOOD WITH YOU!
I DOUBT IT. WE SHALL DESTROY YOU, BUT NOT YET. WE STILL NEED YOUR MEMORIES.
HE'S MAD!

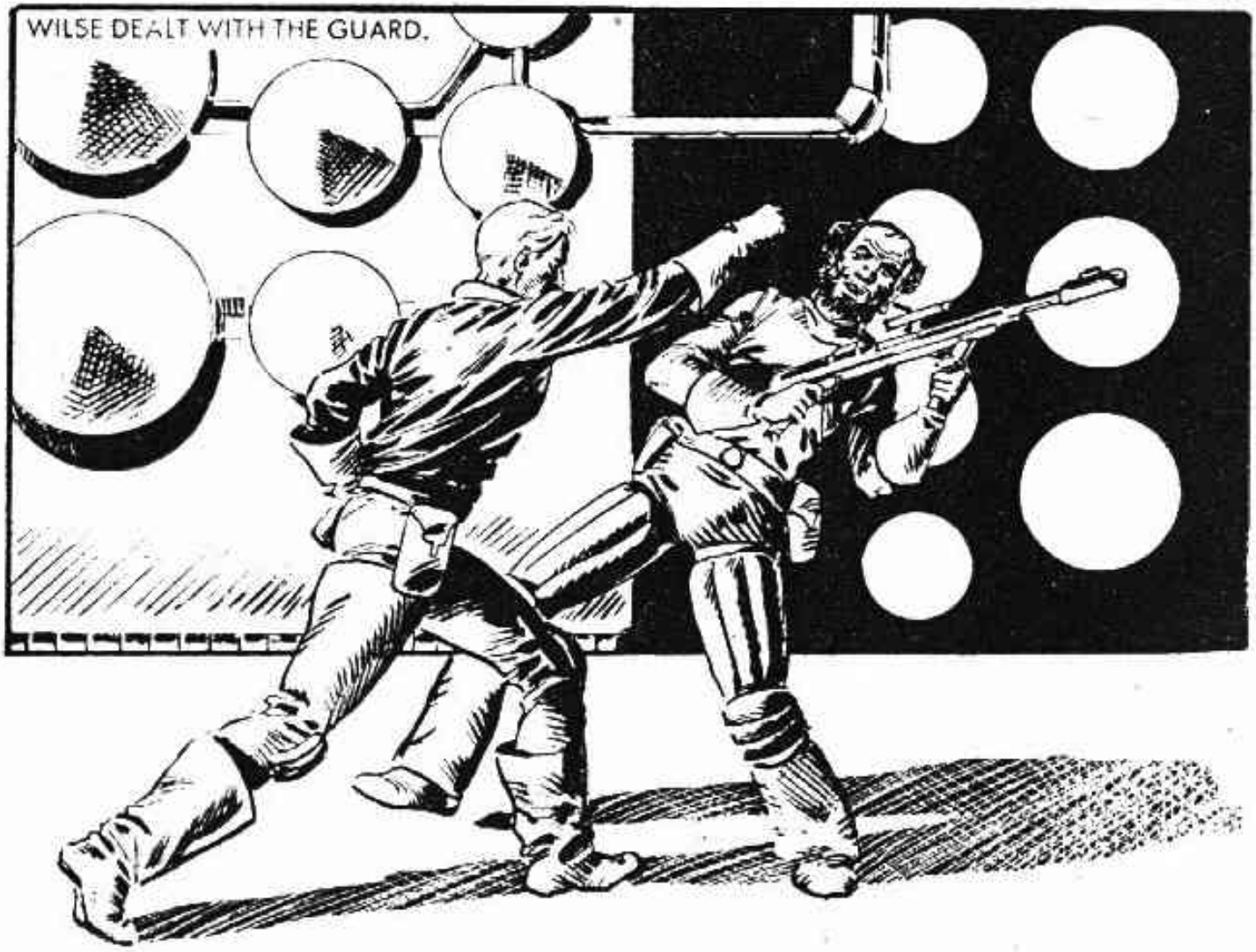
THINK ABOUT THAT CLONE WHILE YOU LIE HELPLESS. THROUGH IT THE BROTHERHOOD WILL SOON CONTROL THE COMMISSIONER, THEN THE GALAXY . . .
I'VE GOT TO STOP THEM, SOMEHOW!

THE ONLY WAY TO EVEN BEGIN DOING THAT IS TO GET OUT OF THIS TANGLE COCOON. PERHAPS THERE IS A WAY . . .

WILSE TUMBLED INTO THE CLONE-CREATING ACID VAT —
THE LIQUID SHOULD DISSOLVE THE COCOON.
THE COCOON'S DISSOLVING AND SO AM I!

TINGLING ALL OVER, BUT FREE OF THE COCOON, WILSE CLIMBED CLEAR.
THAT WAS A CLOSE RUN THING.

A GUARD! I CAN'T GET PAST HIM UNSEEN, SO . . .


WILSE DEALT WITH THE GUARD.

I'M GLAD HE DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO USE THIS. IT'S A FULL ENERGY LASER.
WILSE STARTED BACK —
NOW TO GET BACK TO THE AIRCAR AND CONTACT THE COMMISSIONER!
NO ENTRY

THAT COULD LEAD TO AN EXIT.
WILSE OPENED THE HATCH.
AS WILSE APPROACHED THE CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT—
GREAT SPACE, IT'S THE CENTRAL COMPUTER! IT SEEMS DESERTED, TOO. IF I COULD GET HOLD OF THEIR RECORDS . . .
IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

WHAT . . . ?
STOP!
NO CHANCE!

BUT REINFORCEMENTS WERE ON THE WAY.

WILSE WAS PINNED DOWN—
THE ODDS ARE LOOKING A BIT LONG!

THE COMPUTER EXPLODED.
THERE GO THEIR RECORDS!
THE CATWALK FRACTURED.

HUGE SHARDS OF WOOD BEGAN TO RAIN DOWN FOLLOWING THE EXPLOSION.
I'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE. THEY'VE HOLLOWED OUT TOO MUCH OF THE TREE AND THE DEAD WOOD'S BEGINNING TO FALL.
YOU'VE DONE A GREAT DEAL OF DAMAGE, WILSE. BUT IT ENDS HERE!

LOOK OUT!
DON'T TRY TO TRICK ME!
NOOO!

GREAT SPACE! I'LL BETTER SHIFT.
WILSE RAN A DEADLY RACE . . .
. . . WITH THE FIRE GAINING BEHIND HIM.

..UNTIL HE WAS OUT.
NOW TO FIND THE AIRCAR AND GET OUT OF HERE!
WILSE FOUND THE AIRCAR.
I ONLY HOPE RAMO WAS FAKING AND THE AIRCAR REALLY WORKS!

JUST IN TIME.
BLACK HOLES OF DENEB. IT'S GOING!
THE TREE FELL.

THE BRANCHES OF THE KING TREES WERE TOO TIGHTLY INTERLOCKED FOR ONE TREE TO FALL ALONE . . .
AND SO THE TREES FELL LIKE DOMINOES.
RAMO WAS WRONG. THE TREES AREN'T IMMORTAL. THEY'RE ALL FALLING!

WHAT THE . . . ?
WILSE REACTED QUICKLY.

WHO . . .
GET UP . . . YOU ARE ABOUT TO DIE.
ME! BUT HOW? ITS MY CLONE.
THE ONLY THING MISSING FROM ME WAS YOUR MEMORY. ALL MY OTHER PROGRAMMING WAS DONE—INCLUDING THE INSTRUCTION TO ELIMINATE YOU. EVEN YOUR DEATH DOES NOT STOP ME GAINING YOUR ENTIRE MEMORY . . . FOR A CEREBRAL SCANNER CAN DRAIN EVERY IMPULSE UP TO TWO HOURS AFTER DEATH.

YOU WILL NOW . . .
. . . DIE!

THE BROTHERHOOD IS NOT DEAD. THOSE EARTH FOOLS WILL REHABILITATE ME, AND WHEN THEY DO . . .
. . . THE BROTHERHOOD SHALL . . . AAAAH!
BADLY INJURED, WILSE HAD USED A HUGE SPLINTER TO END THE MENACE OF THE BROTHERHOOD.
DEAD . . . IT WAS JUST LIKE KILLING MYSELF. THE CLONE INHERITED ALL MY TRAITS—INCLUDING MY INABILITY TO SHOOT STRAIGHT WITH A HAND-BLASTER.

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AQUARIUS

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AQUARIUS, one of the Zodiac constellations, is another that takes a great deal of imagination to determine the picture, a water carrier, from the vast collection of stars in the area.